

Name: Robin Hubert

Title: Paraprofessional

Residence: Danielson

Organization or Agency: AFSCME Local 3689

Topic: HB 6881 - An Act Concerning Various Revisions to The Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, ranking members and members of the education committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6881, concerning paraprofessional compensation, training and working conditions.

My name is Robin Hubert. I'm a special education paraprofessional at Killingly Memorial School and have been employed by Killingly Public Schools for 32 years. In the fall of 2020, I was recognized by the Board of Education as the school district's 2020-21 Paraprofessional of the Year. I'm a former president of my union, AFSCME Local 3689.

I'm turning 65 this month and I'm on the verge of retiring. I do have a second job — I'm a CNA. I started that a long time ago, working as a CNA during the summers even on the weekends, because my pay as a paraprofessional is so inconsistent. We don't work or get paid for the days when school is not in session. I can't bank on getting the same amount all the time in my paycheck every other week.

When my school district changed from PPO to HSA health insurance plans, I got the sense that a lot of paras didn't want that change, but they felt like they had to make the switch. I was grandfathered me in and HR let me stay on the PPO plan. Other paras didn't have this option. With an HSA, one major medical incident can wipe you out. Low-paid paras gain very little from the tax advantages of an HSA and are unlikely to have thousands of dollars to contribute to such plans. School districts are paying less and less into HSAs, which means we're paying more. We need to move to a health care plan that is affordable and state sponsored since our school districts can't seem to provide them.

Last year in Killingly, the Board of Ed rejected a grant-funded, school-based mental health center at the high school. Even among the general ed students, paraprofessionals are seeing a lot of mental health problems. We're seeing the kids are struggling in the classroom because they're a year or more behind due to Covid learning loss. Paraprofessionals need to be included in more meetings and conversations about the students we work with. Just last week, a teacher told me, "By the way, this student has a problem with bathrooming." It would have been nice to have known that before I started working with the student. We want access to PPTs because we would service our students better if we knew more about what was going on with them.

Thank you,
Robin Hubert